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COVER A

SHARP

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THE DARK AGES

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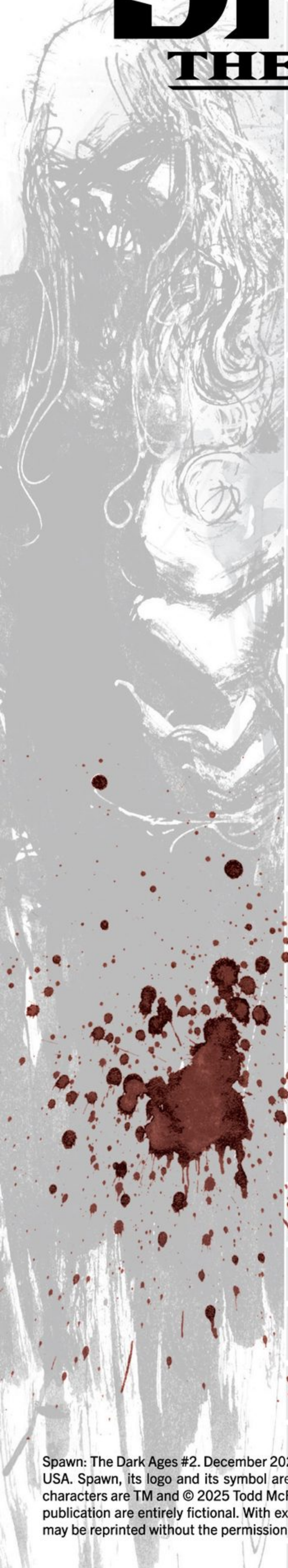

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THE DARK AGES

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PREVIOUSLY IN *SPAWN: THE DARK AGES*

Lord Aurelianus, desperate to defeat the Saxons and protect his Kingdom, makes a deal with the Devil.

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GODODDIN,
WINTER 480AD.

huff...
huff...
DIE!
NÍÐING!
AIGHH!
KEEP IT... TOGETHER, MEN!
hu.. huff...
THE TIDE... TURNS...
AYE.
IT DOES.

HUFF... ARE WE DONE HERE?

IT WOULD SEEM SO.

I TIRE OF THIS.

FROM CANTWARE AND CAER COLUN, TO LINDISWARE, EBRAUC AND GODODDIN, THE SAXON DOGS NIP AT OUR ISLE AS IF T'WERE BONE!

BUT WE KEEP DRIVING THEM NORTH, AND THEY HAVE LEARNED TO FEAR US.

I THINK WE'LL SLEEP SOUNDLY THIS NIGHT, ERLKING!

I CANNOT RECALL WHEN LAST I SLEPT, AURELIANUS, AND SO, I THINK NOT!

IN TRUTH, THIS WORLD ENTIRE FEELS AS DREAMSTUFF TO ME!

BUT SLEEP YOU WELL INDEED,

"LORD ERLKING, IF 'T IS TRULY SO, THEN I PITY YOU. FOR 'T IS ONLY IN THE REALMS OF BLESSÉD SLEEP THAT I DO FIND AUGHT RESEMBLING PEACE!

AND THOUGH THE NIGHT TERRORS MAY SUCH RESPITE INVADE, AND ALL MANNER OF GHASTLY SHADE MAY STEEL ITSELF TO CAST A SWEAT O'ER MY BROW AND DRIVE ME HOWLING FROM MY BED, YET STILL I FIND A PEACE THERE.

FOR I KNOW THAT DREAMS NE'ER DO THIS MORTAL REALM AFFLICT, AND I BID THEM BEGONE WITH IMPUNITY.

AYE, AND THEY DO LISTEN!

NO, SLEEP IS A GIFT AND I'LL BROOK NO GHOST IN IT!

BUT THE ***LIVING*** NIGHT? THERE DWELLS THE HORROR MEN BRING 'PON THEMSELVES...

BUT COME, FRIEND! PRAY THAT TONIGHT WE ARE A' PEACE. FOR WE HAVE EARNED IT!"

UHRR..

AGHHH!!

SCEAÐAN!!

PICTS, NOW? THIS FAR SOUTH?

YOU SAVED MY LIFE, DREAD LORD. I AM INDEBTED, AND I THANK YOU!

WHO WOULD DARE QUESTION SUCH A UNION AS OURS NOW?

MEN EVER FIND CAUSE TO DIVIDE THEIR OWN, TO FOMENT DISTRUST, AND CLOUD CLEAR EYES.

'T IS IN THE SHELLS OF MEN'S EARS THAT DOUBTS ABIDE, AWAITING THE NURTURE OF A SERPENT'S TONGUE...

WHY ALWAYS SO ***BLEAK,*** FRIEND?

WHAT SAY YOU, THEN– THAT WE ARE ALL FALLEN BEYOND HOPE?

SHOULD A KING NOT HOLD TRUE TO THE PROMISE OF A ***LONG*** AND ***LASTING PEACE?***

THRONES ARE THE SEATS OF ***HOLY FOOLS,*** AND KINGS ARE OBLIGED TO PERCH UPON THEM!

WHAT ***TRUTHS*** YOU HOLD DEAR IN THE RIB-GIRDED CAGE OF YOUR CHEST AND WHAT ***LOFTY FOLLIES*** YOU CHOOSETH TO MOUNT YOUR KINGDOM 'PON, THESE ***NE'ER*** THE SAME BE...

WINCHESTER.

"GREETINGS, GENERAL ATILIUS."

I TRUST YOU ARE WELL?

LADY DANUNNOS.

LET'S NOT OUR APPOINTED STATIONS ATTEST TO THAT WHICH OUR HEARTS FEEL NAUGHT. N'ERTHELESS, IT IS MY DUTY TO ATTEND YOU, AND SO I MUST.

YOU SPEAK ONLY FOR YOURSELF, MY LORD.

MY HEART SUFFERS NO ILL SENTIMENTS TOWARDS YOU, WHATSOEVER PAUCITY OF SUCH WITHERS IN YOUR OWN FOR ME.

I SOUGHT YOUR COUNCIL, IN THE ABSENCE OF OUR LORDS, IN THE HOPE WE MIGHT FORGE BONDS, AND IN DOING SO STRENGTHEN THE UNION OF THOSE WE SERVE IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THOSE WHOM ***THEY,*** IN TURN, SERVE--THE ***GOOD PEOPLES*** OF THESE STORIED LANDS...

AND WHAT OF ***HE*** THAT WE ***ALL*** MUST SERVE? WHAT PLACE HAS ***HE*** IN THE HEATHEN HEART?

KNOW YOU WELL, GOOD SIR, THAT MY ALLEGIANCE LIES WITH THE ***MOTHER*** OF ALL, NOT YOUR FATHER, OR HIS SON, OR INDEED THE VIRGIN VESSEL.

BUT I SEE MY HOPES WERE MISPLACED. I AM SORRY TO HAVE TROUBLED YOU. I'LL TAKE MY LEAVE AND BID YOU GOOD DAY.

HADRIAN'S WALL
FLEE, DOGS!
TELL YOUR KIN THAT THE KING AND THE ERLKING COMETH!

I KNOW WHO YE ARE, ***DIA NAN SEALG-OIDHCHE!***

TAE FIND YE BOC'H TAE BOC'H WITH BRITONS, THO? COME ON, MAN! ARE WE NO YOUR KETH AN' KEN?

IF THE NATURE OF MAN WAS TO FIND PEACE IN SHARED BELIEFS, THERE SHOULD BE NO WARS LEFT IN ALL THE WORLD.

WAIT...

LORD ***DREST GURTHINMOCH,*** I BID YOU NOT JUDGE US TOO HASTILY!

I WOULD SPEAK WITH YOU ABOUT ***UNITING*** ALL THE PICTS AGAINST THE SAXONS--UNDER YOUR GOODLY KINGSHIP--IF ONLY YOU WILL FIRST RIDE WITH ME TO WINCHESTER...

HA! RIDE WATH ***YOUS?*** ***NEVER!***

NO UNTIL ***GWENT*** BLOWS ***LOAR*** FRAY THE VERY SKY...

GOOD! THEN WE ARE AGREED, SIR!

TO WINCHESTER WE'LL STEAL, AND THERE, HEAL SUCH DISTANCES AS ONLY THESE GREAT WALLS DIVIDE AND STERN AND STUBBORN BELIEFS PROVIDE!

"ALL-MOTHER! DO YOU HEAR ME YET?"

MANY THE LIVES HAVE I USURPED IN BECOMING YOUR EARTHLY AGENT! HAVE I NOT, IN TRUTH, SERVED YOU MOST SOUNDLY THESE AGES LONG?

AND HERE I MUST WITNESS YOUR SLOW DEMISE LIKE ANOTHER FALL OF EMPIRE, WHILST ABOVE IT A NEW SON DOTH RISE, REBORN...

BUT WAS NOT *I* FIRST REBORN? *YOUR* SON, *YOUR* KING?

WHAT OF THE WORLD I WAS TO SHAPE IN *YOUR* NAME? WHAT OF *THAT?*

OR WAS I ALWAYS TO BE JUST A BEGGAR'S MONARCH, LEFT TO HAUNT THESE HALLOWED LANDS?

"I, THE KING OF THE DISPOSSESSED, LITTLE MORE THAN A WARRIOR KNAVE, LOWLY VASSAL TO YET ANOTHER KING, SEEKING RECOMPENSE FOR SUCH ILLS AS WERE DONE UNTO ME?"

MOTHER! HAST THOU *FORSAKEN* ME?

WINCHESTER. SPRING. 481AD.

AH, MOST GRACIOUS LORD AURELIANUS, MY KING AND SOVEREIGN!

'T IS GOOD TO FIND YOU TAKING THIS SWEET AND PERFUMED AIR!

THE STORMCOCKS ARE SILENT, AND THE ROSE BLOOMS FULL FAIR.

THOUGH, A WARNING--

BE THOU EVER WATCHFUL FOR THORNS!

FATHER KENTIGERN, YOUR SUBTLE TONGUE BROOKS NO EQUAL, TRULY!

SPEAK PLAINLY.

YOU FLATTER ME, MY LORD. T'IS OF...LITTLING IMPORT...

MIGHT ONE ***HUMBLY*** DEIGN TO INQUIRE ABOUT THE ***UNHOLY UNION*** FORGED WITH THE ***DEVIL SPAWN,*** AND WHENCE THAT MIGHT DRAW TO AN ACCEPTABLE CONCLUSION...

'ACCEPTABLE CONCLUSION'?

WHAT MIGHT SUCH A THING LOOK LIKE TO YOU, PRAY TELL?

A FAIR QUESTION INDEED, MY LORD! AND, I'FAITH, I CAN BUT SEE ***ONE*** RECOURSE:

IN GOOD TIME- MAYHAPS WITHIN THE IDES OF MAY, WHICH ASSUREDLY DO DRAW NEAR-

'T WOULD BE FITTING TO DRIVE THAT ***VILE DEOFOL,*** AND ALL THE ***CURSED PAGANS*** THAT SO ATTEND HIM, BACK TO BEFOUL OLD LONDINIUM TOWN ANEW.

NO?

OH?

AND THEN WHAT OF MY ***WORD?***

DOES THE ***BOND OF THE KING*** MEAN NAUGHT NOW?

BUT SIRE!

'T IS NOT ***POSSIBLE*** TO FORGE A ***PACT*** WITH A ***DEOFOL*** WITHOUT THE VERY ***TARNISHING*** OF ***ONE'S OWN IMMORTAL SOUL!***

SUCH BONDS MEAN ***NOTHING,*** AND INDEED, YOU ***MUST*** BREAK THEM! I'FAITH, SIRE! FOR THE VERY KINGDOM, YOU MUST!

FOR THE ***KINGDOM,*** YOU SAY? AND HAS THIS 'DEOFOL' NOT HELPED ME ***HEAL*** THIS VERY KINGDOM?

AND IF ***GOD HIMSELF*** DID NOT THIS UNION ATTEST, WOULD NOT THE SEA, RISE UP AND MAKE A SOP OF US, ALIKE ***ATLANTIS*** OF OLD?

MY LORD, WILLST THOU NOT BE SWAYED?

I WILL NOT BETRAY HE WHO STAYED A PICTISH BLADE AND SAVED THE CROWN, DEOFOL OR NO.

THOUGH NEITHER DO I BELIEVE HE ***IS*** WHAT YOU THINK HIM TO BE...

MY KING.

HE THINKS ME A FOOL, LADY DANUNNOS.

I HAVE OFT' THOUGHT THE SUN HAS NO MIND OF ITS OWN. BUT IT DOES WHAT IT MUST.

AND IN THE WAKE OF IT, ALL SEASONS COMPLETE THEIR CYCLES, AND ALL LIFE STIRS ANEW.

HO!

SO, AM I FOOLISH, AND MINDLESS AS THE SUN? OR IS IT IN THINKING SUCH OF ME THAT *HE* IS THE FOOL?

HA HA!

PERHAPS IT IS SIMPLY THAT YOU THINK *TOO MUCH!*

WALK WITH ME...

THERE'S A *GATE* HERE?

BY ALL THE BLESSÉD SAINTS...

...I'FAITH, WERE E'EN THE GARDENS THAT HUNG IN ANCIENT ***BABYLON*** E'ER SO FAIR?

TO ***THINK...***

HOW HAS THIS GONE SO LONG ***UNFOUND,*** BEYOND THE WALLED REFUGE, WHERE, AS A YOUTH, I STOLE AWAY LONG SUMMER DAYS IN MERRY QUESTS, AND FROM MY TUTORS HID IN EVERY KNOTTED BRIAR AND BRAMBLE?

HOW COULD I NOT *KNOW* OF THIS?

COULD IT NOT BE THAT YOU JUST *FORGOT* IT?

HERE THE OLDE GODS ARE REMEMBERED.

DID YOU EVER CONSIDER HOW *YOUR* YOUNG GOD PREACHES A MESSAGE OF *LOVE,* AND YET...

...'T IS THE WARS FOUGHT IN HIS NAME THAT DO MOST SCAR THIS WORLD?

IT IS TRUE THAT WE ARE AS YET MOST CRUEL AND UNRULY CHILDREN!

WE CAN BUT PRAY THAT, IN TIME, HIS WORD REACHES TO AND IS HEARD IN THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD, AND THENCEFORTH SHALL A LASTING PEACE BECOME THE FOUNDATION 'PON WHICH HIS NEW KINGDOM'S BEGUN.

HM. WELL...

NO ARMY WAS *EVER* RAISED BY THE FOLLOWERS OF *THIS* DEITY–

CERNUNNOS.

HE WHO'S HORNS AND CLOVEN FEET YOUR GOOD PRIESTS LATER STOLE, AND GIFTED YOUR 'DEOFOL' TO BESMIRCH THE GODS OF OLDE!

LIKE **PAN**, AND **BACCHUS**, AND ALL FAUNKIND, HE IS LIFE, LOVE, LAUGHTER, AND DEATH.

THE **GOD** OF THE **CYCLES.**

AND HERE IS **DANU**, OR **GAEA**, OR **SHEELA-NA-GIG**, THE **MOTHER.**

FROM HER HIPS SPRANG **ALL LIFE!**

FOR SURELY IT WAS A **MOTHER**, NOT A FATHER, THAT BIRTHED ALL THINGS...

NO?

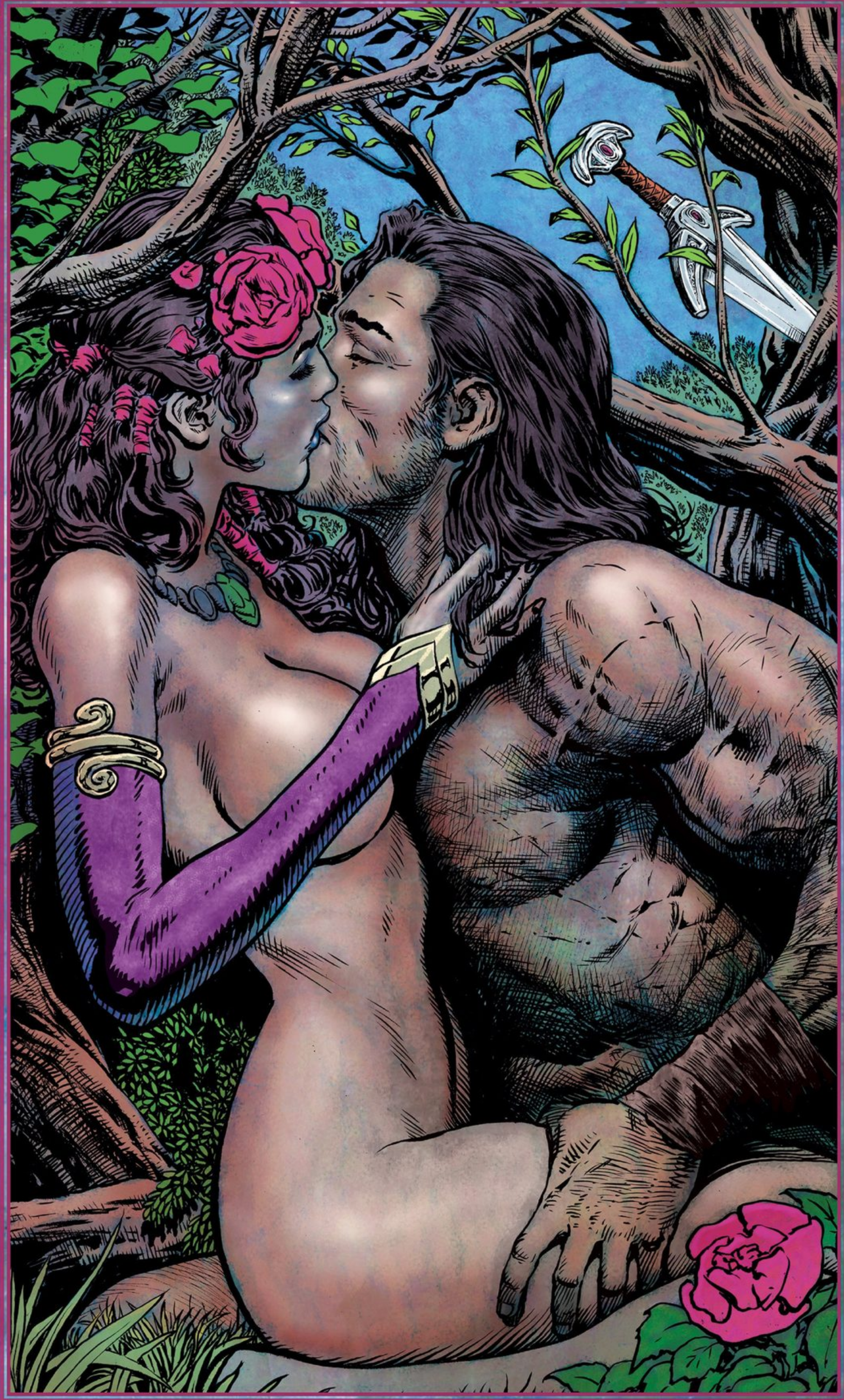
THE WORLD, AND SHE, **ARE ONE**, MY KING!

I AM NAMED FOR BOTH CERNUNNOS AND DANU.

THROUGH ME, AND THE ERLKING, THEY LIVE ON.

THROUGH **WE THREE**, THEY CONTINUE TO PROTECT THIS SACRED ISLAND...

DANUNNOS... I...



TO BE CONTINUED...

SpaWn: The Dark Ages - Glossary

Dia nan Sealg-Oidhche – Literally, ‘God of the Night Hunt’ (Scottish Celtic translation).

Boc’h – Cheek (Scottish Celtic).

Gwent – Wind (Scottish Celtic).

Loar – The moon (Scottish Celtic).

Níðing – Coward (Anlo-Saxon).

Sceaðan – Assassin (Old English).

Stormcock – Mistle Thrush (bird). In folklore they were believed to sing before coming storms.

SPAWN CROSSOVER *GEIGER*
RECKLESS **EAST OF WEST** **I KILL GIANTS**
THE WALKING DEAD I HATE FAIRYLAND
THE DEPARTMENT OF TRUTH ***SEX CRIMINALS***
KILLADELPHIA BATTLE CHASERS
SAVAGE DRAGON
PRETTY DEADLY **BLACK SCIENCE** THE WICKED + THE DIVINE
MONSTRESS **CHEW** *SWEET PAPRIKA*
GIDEON FALLS
MOONSTRUCK UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY **SKYWARD** OBLIVION SONG
DESCENDER ***PAPER GIRLS*** **THE OLD GUARD**
INVINCIBLE WANTED *BITTER ROOT*
STRAY DOGS WHAT'S THE FURTHEST PLACE FROM HERE **SNOTGIRL**
SAGA *KICK-ASS* **WITCHBLADE** *ISOLA*
INKBLOT
GOD COUNTRY **CRIMINAL** DIE
FIRE POWER *NOCTERRA*
HAPPY! JUPITER'S LEGACY
LITTLE BIRD **RAT QUEENS** **RADIANT BLACK**
ICE CREAM MAN **DECORUM** ***BITCH PLANET***
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